

## **BBC Radio Leeds Breakfast Show – 8.08 am, 15 October 2008**

### ***[In Studio]***

**Presenter A:** It's Andrew and Georgie, it's eight minutes past eight. Thank you for all your messages about trying to get an appointment at the doctor and whether you can manage to do and what situation you need to be in to even get one and how your computer is going to make a difference. I suppose it boils down to the whole thing of if you need to see a doctor can you get to see the GP?

**Presenter G:** Exactly.

**Presenter A:** Well you think 'Something's got to give, how can I do it?' Well they say they're only open during office hours. You think 'Well I'm at work so how does that fit in?' Statistics out today from the Government, more and more GP Practices, they're ahead of target they're actually seeing people out of hours, weekends, evenings and the rest of it.

**Presenter G:** Well get this! We've got the latest advance, online appointment bookings. It seems so simple and from what BBC Radio Leeds reporter in Bradford, Clive Settle, has been witnessing it may soon be coming to a surgery near you too.

### ***[Broadcast from Saltaire Medical Practice, background noise of children]***

**Reporter:** It's a hassle isn't it, juggling children, trying to get ready for work and attempting to book a doctor's appointment all at the same time. The phonelines are in meltdown and when you eventually get through there's the not inconsiderable task of the Surgery Receptionist to negotiate. But Saltaire Medical Practice is one of three in Yorkshire pioneering the idea of online appointment booking. According to Business Manager Catherine Darlington it's going down well with patients.

**Business Manager:** Very positive. They can come into the Practice and after a very simple registration process they can go straight home and within an hour they can be booking appointments and prescriptions.

**Reporter:** Maybe I'm doing people down here and I've got people wrong but when I first heard about this I tend to think well, that's for younger patients isn't it? I could be wrong.

**Business Manager:** The first person to sign up for our services was a gentleman of rather advanced years. So the 'silver surfer' is out there!

**Reporter:** Is this the future do you think?

**Business Manager:** It very much is. We are looking forward to other developments such as SMS texting and lots of other things.

**Reporter:** So far only a handful of the surgery's 10,000 patients are actually going online to book a doctor's appointment. But one who is, is very satisfied.

**Patient:** It's really quite simple. All you do is you put your details in first, so this can be your own log in screen and then I think it will go through to the doctors as well. I just find it quite easy, I've just booked for my daughter who's in there now. It's quite easy. Because of the price of mobile phones I can't afford to be on for more than five minutes, you can be on there for ages. I haven't booked any prescriptions or anything like that through the online but I intend to.

**Reporter:** GP Shaun Millns Sizer also welcomes the new technology but can't imagine becoming a cyber doctor.

**Bradford GP:** We haven't really engaged in email consultations. That's another big way of treating some people. We offer telephone consultations at the moment but still most of our mainstay is face to face. People like talking to doctors. It's the personal touch and people love it. So why get rid of something people want?

**Reporter:** Routine appointments can be booked anything up to three months in advance so it's definitely the way to go. But a computer can never replace the old bedside manner can it?

**[In Studio]**

**Presenter A:** So what's new my friend? He's got a good bedside manner has our Clive.

**Presenter G:** He certainly has. I wouldn't mind him by my bedside, in times of need.

**Presenter A:** Ashley in Baildon though says "We've had surgery online booking appointments for six months and repeat prescriptions too. It works very well, when it works."

**Presenter G:** Ah yes. Another text: "Hi A&G, I wish my surgery would do this. I also hope they can get past this Government target where you have to be offered an appointment within 48 hours or something like that."

**Presenter A:** Jill says by text "We've been able to book online at the 'quacks' for ages, it's brilliant!" Dave says "Booking online? Not everyone has the Internet. Bradford libraries had better get their fingers out, we could be waiting years to see our doc otherwise." I do think they'll let you ring still and perhaps even text as they were talking about as you heard there.

[Gives out number] Straight from your mobile to us in the studio this morning. An interesting email to read in a second but let's actually speak to a doctor from Leeds, works at the Victoria Medical Centre in Barnsley, where they've used an online booking system for more than a year. In fact Mark sent us this

text, it says: "We've been offering online appointment bookings at our surgery for almost two years. Mark, GP in Barnsley."

**Presenter G:** How's it working Mark? Good Morning.

**[Phone In]**

**Barnsley GP:** Morning. I think the take up has been a bit slow, we've been checking. We've perhaps been offering this for about two and a half years.

**Presenter G:** Gosh!

**Barnsley GP:** Out of the size of 7,500 about 60 have just about registered.

**Presenter A:** Right, what was the thinking behind it? Just to make it easier to get an appointment Mark, and to free up the people on the phones?

**Barnsley GP:** It's partly that but it also eases pressure on the phone system so that other people can get through. If it's possible to book appointments without taking up phone time, it makes it easier for people to get through for other things.

**Presenter G:** And what about the people who aren't on the Internet? Have they made a complaint to you about it, people that don't actually go online?

**Barnsley GP:** We certainly haven't heard that. It doesn't affect people being able to book on the telephone.

**Presenter A:** I suppose the argument is if you've not got staff tied, there's going to be more time to answer people on the phone because those who are doing it online obviously aren't going to be ringing. And how would it work? Is it a bit like booking a ticket for the cinema, or theatre or an aeroplane where you see on the screen the slots and you put yourself in there?

**Barnsley GP:** Yes you see the available slots and you put your name down. We release appointments in advance and we can choose which ones are available and they book them in.

**Presenter A:** Now why do you think it's not taken off as much as you would have liked? Because we're already hearing from people who are happy to text but haven't got access to a computer or don't want to. Or think of my mum and dad who haven't been down the computer road. My mum freely texts all the time, just the computer thing didn't take off. She says to me more and more I feel as though we're being left out. Everyone says you can read this or get that bit of information there.

**Barnsley GP:** There must be a little bit of that and probably it's too easy to pick up the phone and speak to someone than it is to switch on the computer and go through the system. I suppose the people who book online are the ones who habitually use it for other things.

**Presenter A:** How long is your appointment slot Mark? I know you are in Leeds but you're a GP in Barnsley.

**Presenter G:** You've had two minutes now.

**Presenter A:** How much time have I got left? What's your average slot?

**Barnsley GP:** We have a philosophy of not really trying to do that. We tend to run late quite a lot. We have a philosophy of not really doing that. We usually run on ten minute slots.

**Presenter A:** Online Doc sent this text Mark, what do you make of this? "Security, security, security. How secure is it?"

**Barnsley GP:** It's a direct system run through the computer providers and they need a unique password.

**Presenter A:** Right so you get that when you register for the system then. It's interesting with me, I always have to say when I ring the doctor It's the Andrew Edwards who lives at XXX because there's two of us who are a couple of days apart in terms of dates of birth. So if you do the old date thing it doesn't necessarily check out. I can see that's a legitimate concern isn't it?

**Barnsley GP:** Yes the password is unique so it's fine.

**Presenter A:** That's good it's another one for us to forget then. So that's rather silly isn't it? Mark, very nice to hear you. But you'd like to see more of it, two and a half years and counting? The message is it works and you'd like to see more of it?

**Barnsley GP:** I certainly would Yes.

**Presenter A:** Great to hear from you, thanks very much Mark.

**Barnsley GP:** Okay.

**Presenter A:** There we are, Dr Mark Smith at his surgery in Barnsley. He lives in Leeds though. I think he was our first text of the morning, quick out of the box at just after 6.00 am when we first mentioned this. [Gives out number] to call.

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